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Candidates for Chevy Chase's town council debate mansionization, Purple Line

Two incumbents seeking re-election face one challenger in Tuesday's election

by Sarah Gantz | Staff Writer

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The approach to controlling mansionization was among the few issues three candidates for the town's council disagreed about at a candidate forum Thursday.

Challenger Deborah A. Vollmer has based her campaign against incumbents Linna Barnes and Patricia Burda on her belief that the town needs to revise its procedures for granting building permits and should do more to protect trees and historic buildings. Both Barnes and Burda disagree with Vollmer's position and said Thursday they think the town's policies represent a compromise between residents who want bigger homes and those who do not.

"We came up with a compromise. Do I think some of the houses are too big? Yes, I do. But would I reopen that debate? Absolutely not," Burda said.

Vollmer said the town should include in its permit application process an opportunity for neighbors to appeal the project for reasons such as damage to trees, interference with sunlight and drainage problems.

Residents must appeal building permits in court, which Vollmer is currently doing. In 2009 she filed a lawsuit against the town to appeal its decision to grant her neighbors a 15-foot building setback, which she says is too close to the road for a corner lot.

Vollmer said at the forum Thursday that she did not foresee her legal involvement with the town affecting council actions other than those regarding the litigation.

"This is nothing more than an appeal of a building," Vollmer said.

Vollmer also took a different position on whether the town should consider legal action to halt the proposed Purple Line Metrorail project.

While Vollmer said she thinks the town should continue to resist the proposed light rail and would consider litigation, Barnes and Burda said they would favor working with state officials to monitor the project.

"It's too expensive. I can't see us having litigation on it," Barnes said. Burda said litigation was unlikely and that the only instance in which she would consider it would be as part of a coalition action that did not require the town to take the lead.

Election day for the town is 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the town office, 4301 Willow Lane, Chevy Chase.

sgantz@gazette.net



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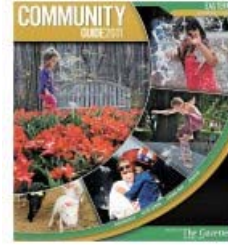
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